



Orange County District Attorney

Press Release

TONY RACKAUCKAS, District Attorney
401 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 20, 2000

Contact: Tori Richards
 (714) 347-8405

District Attorney Implements DNA 'Innocence Project'

SANTA ANA --- District Attorney Tony Rackauckas has implemented a program aimed at identifying inmates who claim they are innocent and have forensic evidence to prove it. This is the first such program in the state where a prosecution agency is working with the defense in order to identify inmates who may be wrongfully convicted.

Named the "Innocence Project," this program involves the testing of DNA, fingerprints or other evidence at the request of a convicted inmate. Any inmate who believes that he or she is innocent will be afforded an opportunity to provide evidence to prove this. Inmates will be notified of this project by orange-colored notices that will be posted in prison libraries. Inmates must write to the DNA coordinator at the DA's office to submit their case for consideration.

A special committee comprised of two prosecutors (including a DNA specialist) and either a deputy public defender or law professor will look through the applications to determine which cases actually contain forensic evidence that could be tested by the Sheriff's Crime Lab. Testing will be ordered on those cases. If DNA testing shows that the inmate did not commit the crime, the district attorney will file a writ of habeas corpus to petition the inmate's release.

In order to implement "The Innocence Project," Rackauckas worked closely with the Public Defender's Office and the California District Attorney's Association in identifying key issues pertaining to this program. A similar bill is going through the Legislature, but Rackauckas decided to move ahead with this version which is less restrictive. It will be a companion program to TrackRS, which was implemented in 1997 and its greatest success was identifying a serial killer who was free while another man had been wrongfully convicted. TrackRS is a one-of-a-kind computer database that links together sexual assault or murder cases with similar evidence or methods, pointing to one suspect.

###